

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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Green Forest school test scores up, taking district off state improvement list (Carroll County News)

GREEN FOREST -- Officials at Green Forest High School recently caught a first glimpse of the results of this year's end-of-course examinations, and what they saw has teachers and administrators clicking their loafers.

Speaking at an academic awards ceremony earlier this week, Principal Barry Hardin told a gymnasium full of teenagers that their hard work had taken the school firmly off the state's improvement list -- where it had been marooned for some seven years until now.

Last year's junior class managed to nudge the school's score on the annual literacy exam high enough to make the mark, but only barely -- after school administrators appealed a number of scores to the Arkansas Department of Education.

Hardin said this year's class had built on last year's success. A whopping 81 percent of students who tested this year scored proficient or advanced -- dwarfing past year's scores for the district and outpacing other schools in the state.

That marks a 27 percent increase from last year, Hardin said, and is higher than any other year since the inception of the tests.

Superintendent Matt Summers said the state average for the 11th grade literacy exam was only 70 percent this year and that the average for districts in the region was only slightly higher -- at 75 percent.

Summers said moving off the list gave school officials more discretion in how to spend district money. For schools that remain on the list for multiple years, the state can require officials to pay for remedial and enrichment programs, punish them by withholding funding, or -- in extreme cases -- even take over the administration of the school.

Students' achievements over the last two years help to prevent those scenarios. Beyond this, Summers said, the success is a morale booster for students and staff.

"There's a pride factor there, as well," the superintendent said. "We want our schools to be successful."

"It's been a work in progress for some time," he added. "(but) It's very pleasant reading when you get something like that and see that much of a marked improvement ... We're just tickled to death."

School District Admits to Mistake in Grades for Potential Valedictorian (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=663502

Graduation season should be a happy time for high school seniors but one soon-to-be grad just got some tough news.

An admitted mistake by a central Arkansas school district left a valedictorian hopeful just out of reach of the honor the superintendent told her she achieved.

The Cabot School District say they made a mistake.

Superintendent Dr. Tony Thurman says it's an unfortunate mistake but the distinction of valedictorian can't be given to someone who turns out doesn't deserve it.

Dr. Thurman says he's very sorry and hates that this is happening especially as the error came to light less than a week before the student had planned to speak as valedictorian in front of her entire class.

You can usually find Celina Miranda buried in her books somewhere. That's what it takes to reach the top of the class.

"I don't sleep much because I'm studying all the time," Miranda said. "They told me I was tied for first."

With that honor the awards and recognition's have piled up for the Cabot High School senior.

The District sent her to a banquet at the Governor's Mansion as a top-2 student. She's an "Arkansas Times Academic All-Star." The school even asked her to prepare what she wanted to say at commencement.

"My superintendent said go ahead make your speech, make us sound good," Miranda explained.

Then, less than a week before graduation with her valedictorian speech to fellow students prepared, the plans changed.

"They said there's been a miscalculation and you're actually not first anymore."

Not second, third or even fourth - she dropped to seventh in the class.

The school district admitted to making a mistake in calculations, finding a "B" on her transcript that they had not previously included.

According to their policy handbook, final class rankings are computed on a basis of eight semesters. Students are advised on preliminary GPA and class ranking at the end of the sixth and seventh. Going in to this spring (8th & final semester) the school told Miranda she was at the top of the class, only to have a grade from a previous semester pop up at the last minute.

Despite all this however, Miranda, who has her sights set on being a doctor, isn't bitter.

She feels for the students that missed out on all those same recognition's, banquets and awards they may have deserved all along.

"I feel kind of guilty because there's so many other kids who should have gotten to do that and they didn't," Miranda remarked. "I'm really grateful I got that opportunity but it wasn't supposed to be that way."

She is disappointed but Miranda wonders how many other students might have unknowingly been affected by something similar. She hopes this can serve as a reason to look into the system and maybe make some changes to make sure this never happens again.

School searched at superintendent's request (Little River News)

Foreman Superintendent Jason Sanders takes the district's zero tolerance policy on illegal drugs very seriously. In an effort to enforce the policy, Sanders invited the Foreman Marshal's

Office to do a sweep of the campus last Tuesday.

"Mr. Jason Sanders recently contacted me in reference to growing concerns among reports that a few students have possibly been bringing illegal narcotics to school," Foreman Chief

Marshal Alex Mathis said in a statement. "The school has a (zero policy) for drugs in school. The City of Foreman Marshal's Office has also received several reports along these lines. Due to this information, I contacted Texarkana (Ark.) Police Department and requested their assistance with their 'drug dog' Gus so that a search of the school and parking lot could be performed."

In cooperation with the Little River County Sheriff's Office, the Arkansas State Police, and the Texarkana (Ark.) Police Department, the Marshal's Office conducted the search on Tuesday, May 7.

"The search using a 'drug-sniffing trained canine' is done for several reasons, for the safety of the students, the faculty, and to bring awareness to the students, and the community that this problem requires everyone's help," Mathis said. "It also shows the community and the parents that we care, and as a combined effort there will be no tolerance for drugs in our Foreman

School system. We believe the search was a success in addressing all the factors that were brought to our attention."

Sanders said that searches were performed once or twice a year.

“We do these searches for two different reasons,” Sanders said. “One is to make sure our school is safe and drug free. The second is to be proactive. It also allows the drug dogs and police force to be visible. It serves as a deterrent to students who may want to bring drugs on campus.”

During the search officers did find the tip of a smoked marijuana joint that had been thrown into the toilet in the men’s restroom. Sanders said he was glad that was all that was found.

“I am very disappointed that they found that,” Sanders said. “But I am pleased they didn’t find anything else.”

Sanders went ahead to say that more searches would be held in the future and that offenders would be dealt with.

“We want the students to understand that we will continue to have these kinds of searches one or two times a year,” Sanders said. “We also want them to understand that they will face legal ramifications if they bring illegal drugs on campus.”

Mathis said that any information about illegal drugs on the Foreman school campuses would be appreciated.

“We here in the City of Foreman, and surrounding communities ask you that if you have information that concerns this type of activity to not hesitate to contact local law enforcement or the Foreman School District Administration,” Mathis said. “The Foreman Marshal's Office strives extremely hard to provide this community with a professional and safe city and community for its citizens. The City of Foreman Marshal's Office would like to thank everyone for this assistance in this matter, and we look forward to continue serving our community.”

Charter School Picks Headmaster (NWAonline.com)

BENTONVILLE — A charter school expected to open in August has found its leader.

Timm Petersen has been chosen as headmaster of Northwest Arkansas Classical Academy, which will operate at a business park at 1302 Melissa Drive. The school will open with 445 students in grades kindergarten through eight, but plans to expand by one grade per year until it has a 12th grade.

Petersen, 52, is the director of Vista Academy in The Woodlands, Texas. That school is run by Responsive Education Solutions, the same organization running Northwest Arkansas Classical Academy.

The academy will be the only charter school in Bentonville. Its classical curriculum will stress grammar, logic and rhetoric. Character, integrity and a strong work ethic also will be emphasized, Petersen said.

"If they're building those kinds of character traits, they're going to want to learn new things," he said.

Petersen has worked in education for 20 years, starting as a teacher and basketball coach at Northwest Academy in Houston, now known as Houston Christian High School. He went on to serve as athletic director and chaplain of Rose Hill Christian School in Tomball, Texas.

Petersen was the head of school at Covenant Academy in Cypress, Texas, before joining Responsive Education Solutions in 2009.

Joe Quinn, who helped organize efforts to bring Northwest Arkansas Classical Academy to Bentonville, said Petersen is a strong leader.

"He is exactly what we have been looking for to continue the process of making this school a dynamic part of Bentonville," Quinn said. "He's actually run a school in the Houston area that has some very similar demographics to Bentonville."

The biggest challenge, Petersen said, will be helping parents understand the classical model of education and how it works.

"And we're not in competition with the local school district," Petersen said. "We're there to be an option for folks who want options."

The school is leasing space just west of Outdoor Cap and north of the Benton County Jail. Both Bentonville and the Arkansas Board of Education recently approved the site for a school.

About 1,000 students applied to the school earlier this year. A lottery was held last month to determine which students would be admitted.